

A definitive glimpse and comparative study of translations of the Qur'an

This is a short piece of work designed to explore different translations of only some parts of the Qur'an to see what issues are posed with current translations and to see why the preferred translation of this study being *Kanz-ul-Īmān - The Treasure of Faith* by Ahmad Rida is better than the rest, in fact, it truly being the best as well as the most accurate and respective translation to date, in the opinion of the author of this study as well as many. Some possible objections which could be posed regarding this translation will be mentioned as well as their replies.

This study is not designed to deal with comparing the translations of the entire Qur'an; this itself is a separate study in its entirety, and also due to the fact that the purpose of this study is to be concise, hence only the translations pertaining to those few parts of the Qur'an which are a speciality of translation of *The Treasure of Faith*. will be discussed.

Please note *Kanz ul Īmān* is an Urdu work and has been jointly translated by a scholar from South Africa and myself, hence this specific translation will be used here. At this current moment in time, there are two other well known translations of *Kanz ul Īmān* as well as others which are lesser well known, however they all had issues with them hence the latest translation will be used. The idea of this work is not to compare them works, but to depict and show the speciality and uniqueness of *The Treasure of Faith*.

So in effect, though we are discussing a translation of a translation, though the idea is generally the same.

The translations which will be used for this comparative analysis in this study are as follows:

1. Sahih International
2. Pickthall
3. Yusuf Ali
4. Shakir
5. Muhammad Sarwar
6. Mohsin Khan
7. Arberry
8. Tafhim al-Qur'an (Maududi)
9. *Kanz-ul-Īmān* (Ahmad Rida)

Basmalah

First *Basmalah* will be discussed as this is the starting of all good actions for Muslims, due to the following *Hadīth*:

"كل أمر ذي بال لا يبدأ باسم الله الرحمن الرحيم فهو أبت¹"

Every mindful matter which is not initiated with Basmalah, so it is defective/disassociated/cut off.

Thus when one is beginning a chapter (sūrah) of the Qur'an, one should recite Basmalah on one's own accord. But the Qur'an itself preaches to do so, highlight its importance, which is why Allāh mentions it at the start of 113 chapters from its 114 chapters.

1. In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.
2. In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
3. In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
4. In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
5. In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

¹ There are other narrations alongside this with a slight change of words, thus the change of words which are major have been translated above.

6. In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.
7. In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
8. In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Whilst there is nothing apparently incorrect or wrong with these translations, the *Hadīth* states to start with the name of Allāh (God), and this is the claim for all translations, however in reality this is not the case, meaning such said claim is not fulfilled nor is the *Hadīth* abided by. As when translating *Basmalah*, Allāh's name was not mentioned at the start of the first 8 translations, rather the word 'In', which can be seen above.

However, the translation of Ahmad Rida is the most accurate and fulfils the *Hadīth* as well as the claim as it begins with the name of Allāh.

9. Allāh's name to begin with; the Most Gracious, the Merciful.

Whilst it may be argued that one is about to initiate a certain task and we are mentioning the name of Allāh before that particular task is undertaken. So it should be that irrespective of the fact that the name Allāh was not mentioned at the start of the translation, it was still mentioned before the task, thus there is no issue with the other translations.

However, our purpose here is to depict how the work of Ahmad Rida is the most accurate translation, and his translation fulfils both initiating the translation of *Basmalah* with the name Allāh and in effect any task which follows, because translating *Basmalah* is also a task in itself, is it not? This shows the great insight of the genius Ahmad Rida to such subtlety.

2:6

1. Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe.
2. As for the Disbelievers, Whether thou warn them or thou warn them not it is all one for them; they believe not.
3. As to those who reject Faith, it is the same to them whether thou warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe.
4. Surely those who disbelieve, it being alike to them whether you warn them, or do not warn them, will not believe.
5. Those who deny your message will not believe whether you warn them or not
6. Verily, those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you (O Muhammad Peace be upon him) warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe.
7. As for the unbelievers, alike it is to them whether thou hast warned them or hast not warned them, they do not believe.
8. As for those who have rejected (these things), it is all the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them: they are not going to believe.

An objection could be made here as to what is the purpose of preaching to non-Muslims when it says that it equal whether you warn them or warn them not; they are not believe. Wouldn't this make the act of preaching to them fruitless in this regard?

9. Undoubtedly, those who are destined to disbelieve, it is the same for them whether you warn them or warn them not; they are not to believe.

Here Ahmad Rida has used 'destined to disbelieve', which shows that if there is a non-Muslim and it is destined for him to believe, then it is not equal in this regard whether you warn him or warn him not; it is only applicable for those non-Muslims in whose destiny it is not to believe.

In addition, no tense has been used with regards to disbelieving which rids any objections regarding those who are currently non-Muslim, for instance, someone may object saying the verse is only regarding those who are going to disbelieve, and not those who currently disbelieve.

However, Ahmad Rida mentions regarding whether their action of disbelieving is destined or not, and destiny covers past, present and future.

Whilst one may argue with regards to the technicality of these translations, that it is only referring to disbelievers and not those disbelievers who are going to accept Islām, judging on the apparent words of the translation, and without any commentary & explanation, the true and most depicting representation of Islām is the translation of Ahmad Rida, which encompasses only that what is meant to be encompassed.

48:2

1. That Allah may forgive for you what preceded of your sin and what will follow and complete His favor upon you and guide you to a straight path.
2. That Allah may forgive thee of thy sin that which is past and that which is to come, and may perfect His favour unto thee, and may guide thee on a right path,
3. That Allah may forgive thee thy faults of the past and those to follow; fulfil His favour to thee; and guide thee on the Straight Way;
4. That Allah may forgive your community their past faults and those to follow and complete His favor to you and keep you on a right way,
5. so that God will redeem the sins (which the pagans think you have committed against them) in the past or (you will commit) in the future. He will complete His favors to you, guide you to the right path,
6. That Allah may forgive you your sins of the past and the future, and complete His Favour on you, and guide you on the Straight Path;
7. that God may forgive thee thy former and thy latter sins, and complete His blessing upon thee, and guide thee on a straight path,
8. so that Allah may pardon you your former and latter faults, and may perfect His blessing upon you and show you the right way

Here all translators have attributed sins to the Prophet Muhammad (salutations and blessings be upon him) of the past and the future. However it is a unanimous belief amongst Muslims that it is not even possible for any Prophet to sin. Also, someone could object saying how can someone who sins be a guide for mankind when he himself commits sins and makes mistakes. The reply to this objection is in the fundamental belief of Islām itself, in the sense that this is not even the creed of Muslims, thus there is no objection in reality. Nevertheless, judging from the apparentness of these translations, this objection still stands.

However let us look at the work of Ahmad Rida.

9. So that Allāh may, for your sake, forgive the sins of your former ones and of your latter ones, and complete His favours upon you, and show you the Straight Path (of fulfilling the responsibilities with regards to Prophethood).

Here Ahmad Rida has said the sins refer to the sins of the nation and not the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), thus ridding the objection of sins being attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him).

93:7

1. And He found you lost and guided [you],
2. Did He not find thee wandering and direct (thee)?
3. And He found thee wandering, and He gave thee guidance.
4. And find you lost (that is, unrecognized by men) and guide (them to you)?
5. Did He not find you wandering about and give you guidance?
6. And He found you unaware (of the Quran, its legal laws, and Prophethood, etc.) and guided you?
7. Did He not find thee erring, and guide thee?
8. And He found you unaware of the Way, then He guided you

Here the words lost, misguided, etc have been used which are not befitting for the someone who Muslims believe as the one who has been sent to guide them. The major objection raised here is that how can someone who has been sent to guide mankind ever be found as lost, misguided, etc?

Respectful is Ahmad Rida.

9. And He found you profoundly engrossed in His love, so He gave you a way (of closeness) towards Himself.

There are many other places in which the difference in translation is also clear, however the purpose here was not to provide an in-depth and complete analysis of the entire Qur'ān, rather it was to solely attempt to present a mere glimpse of the shining difference of the translation of the Qur'ān by Ahmad Rida as compared to the rest of the translations.

There are many other instances in which the vast works of Ahmad Rida shine, whether it is in the traditional sciences or rational sciences. However this work was to only show the glowing difference in light of Qur'ān and it is for this reason amongst many that Ahmad Rida is known as *the neglected genius of the East*, and I hope from reading this study albeit it only being from a Quranic perspective, we now know why.